

First Aid Overview and Description

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The definition of first aid is not as easy as it seems. "First aid" is a catch-all phrase that refers to two distinctly different medical needs.

1. Emergency first aid is exactly that—the first response to a life-threatening (or limb-threatening) medical emergency, either an illness or an injury. It's often called *first responder* training. More advanced medical care will happen after first aid in this case. This type of first aid includes CPR, clearing an airway obstruction, responding to [anaphylactic shock](#), splinting a [broken bone](#), and severe [bleeding control](#).
2. Non-emergency first aid is the treatment we initiate ourselves for minor medical needs. We may or may not seek more advanced medical care after the initial response. This includes taking [over-the-counter medications](#) for minor pain or allergies, [cleaning and bandaging cuts](#) or abrasions, and minor bleeding control.

Learning First Aid

Training for each is unique. Emergency [first aid classes](#) are taught by organizations like the American Red Cross, National Safety Council, and the American Heart Association. There are very few classes for non-emergency first aid. It's the kind of thing we learn from mom or the internet.

To get the best out of emergency first aid, it's important to know how and when to summon help. 911 is the preferred method but misconceptions about [calling 911](#) may make it more difficult than expected. In cases of non-emergency first aid, there are deep wells of information available to help—like the internet or calling your physician's office.

We provide information on both types of first aid, without really discerning between the two. There is an assumption that 911 will be called during a bona fide medical emergency. Just in case, however, there are step-by-step instructions here for CPR and other emergency treatments.

You're encouraged to look around before you actually need any of the information here. For non-emergency questions, come back for answers whenever you need them.